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ABSTRACT

A literature-based approach across the curriculum helps students to personalize content-area curricula, to enjoy reading a diversity of subject-matter materials, and to improve attitudes toward reading. Teachers, supervisors, and administrators can cooperatively support literature-based practice across the curriculum by creating a positive professional attitude, designing thematic units, and incorporating team teaching to provide a realistic context for complementing and transcending traditional textbooks. These approaches also increase the chances of promoting students' long-term reading habit. Carrying out successful literature-based practice, however, depends on genuine sharing among colleagues. Unless cooperation becomes the norm, such worthwhile ideas as using literature across the curriculum will not have the beneficial impact that they deserve. (A figure comparing some factors related to textbooks and literature-based materials is included.) (RS)

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# Schoolwide Literature-Based Practices: Cooperative Leadership Is an Asset

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As an administrator, imagine overhearing a student saying to a former teacher, "Because of you, I continue to read for pleasure." What a fantastic feeling to know that something we promoted in school positively affected a student's lifetime literacy!

One way of encouraging more encounters of this type is to use a literature-based approach across the curriculum. This practice helps our students to personalize content-area curricula, to enjoy reading a diversity of subject-matter materials, and to improve attitudes toward reading. With this foundation established, our students are more likely to become lifetime readers.

Creating the foundation, however, requires all of our cooperative efforts. For example, the building principal, reading/resource room teachers, department supervisors, and classroom teachers are among those who can promote a literature-based approach that both complements and transcends traditional content-area textbooks. This approach includes not only employing classroom strategies but also using such literary works as science fiction, historical fiction, autobiography, biography, and diary. In addition, newspapers, magazines, paperbacks, and other literature-based resources further enrich our students' experiences across the curriculum. As we grow with and realize the value of literature-based efforts, we are more apt to support such efforts on a schoolwide basis.

## Needed: A positive professional attitude

Not surprisingly, the first type of support is to create a positive professional attitude toward literature-based practices.

This can be accomplished by building a "gross-roots" commitment for carrying out the innovation. Among the ways of encouraging a comprehensive, grass-roots commitment is to use department, faculty, and study-group meetings to build a schoolwide rationale for going beyond content-area textbooks. Discussions concerning the limitations of texts can serve as a beginning for considering alternatives. For example, in the science field, the limitations we can highlight are that science textbooks usually consist of a mass of information that is difficult to understand. Although caring teachers use strategies to help students cope with this quantity of concepts, they also should provide students with a variety of materials that both facilitate comprehension of the concepts and create a desire to read in the content areas. Mary Olson, Thomas Gee, and Nora Forester (Journal of Reading, May 1989) suggest that magazines be considered a serious part of the instructional program, including such periodicals as Air & Space, Biology Bulletin Monthly, Current Science, Earth Science, Popular Science, and Science World.

Adding to this rationale is Barbara Guzzetti, Barbara Kowalinski, and Tom McGowan's review of the related professional literature which appears in the October 1992 issue of the Journal of Reading. Social studies textbooks, for instance, are considered uninteresting, disjointed, and lacking in meaning, with unimaginative prose and banal content. Thus, literature is recommended as a significant part of the social studies program since this approach helps students to personalize history, gain

important values, improve critical thinking skills, and develop the lifetime reading habit. (See Figure 1 for a comparison of factors related to textbooks and literature-based materials.)

When the rationale is completed, we have set the stage for productive workshop activities. Staff development efforts, such as setting goals, developing strategies, and considering resources, increase the chances of promoting worthwhile literature-based practices and of creating a positive professional attitude toward these practices.

Successful staff development requires not only genuine cooperation but also a sense of structure. As teachers, supervisors, and administrators, we should therefore consider a practical inservice format, like the approach suggested in Wayne Otto and Lawrence Erickson's Inservice Education to Improve Reading Instruction and in James Shanker's Guidelines for Successful Reading Staff Development (published respectively in 1973 and 1982, IRA). These sources provide a series of steps which can be adapted to meet a variety of professional needs. The practical structure below is an example of such an adaptation which assumes that a literature-based rationale and a related needs assessment have previously been completed.

1. Setting a goal: to increase our knowledge of literature-based practices and to help us develop strategies that support the use of literature across the curriculum.

2. Stating objectives: (a) to identify factors associated with a literature-based approach (school library and classroom library

corner) and to use them in the content areas; (b) to select materials that have literary value; and (c) to use varied approaches that encourage our students to read literature during classroom time.

3. Selecting activities to attain the objectives: (a) we can focus on the school and classroom libraries as major resources that supply our students with content-area literature; (b) we can review materials to determine their appropriateness for our gifted, average, and at-risk learners; and (c) we can engage in activities (discussion, demonstration, practice, etc.) and develop insights concerning such motivational strategies as encouraging readers to select their own literature and guiding them to share related experiences through literature circles, individual conferences, classroom discussions, and other approaches.

4. Evaluating results: the success of the workshop activities is determined by a variety of approaches, including informal comments, anecdotal responses, attitude surveys, and observations verifying that insights we gained about literature-based practices are effectively being used in our content-area classrooms.

In addition to staff development, we need other cooperative efforts to sustain the literature-based innovation and to maintain a positive attitude toward it. Foremost is the involvement of the entire staff during every phase of implementation. For example, as teachers, supervisors, and administrators, we should attempt to reach consensus about the need for a literature-based approach, about the best strategies for a lasting innovation, about the most

appropriate techniques for assessing the innovation, and about the best uses of the budget. This type of comprehensive involvement provides all of us with a profound sense of empowerment and ownership.

Facilitating improvement in students' attitudes

As we develop a positive attitude toward literature across the curriculum, we should help students develop a similar attitude. In the March 1990 issue of the Journal of Reading, Barbara Guzzetti suggests three instructional strategies that have facilitated improvement in students' attitude about reading. Using character charts, creating paradigms, and supporting the reader's role as raconteur can positively affect students' attitude, especially when these strategies are used with trade books.

Briefly described, character charts are an individual's own visual representations of characters in a book, and these visual displays include captions which support the selection of specific images to represent the book's characters. The charts motivate students to make inferences above the author's character development as the students draw or locate pictures and illustrations that enrich textual meaning. Assistance in developing character charts is provided through prereading, reading, and postreading activities.

Paradigms motivate learners to create graphic displays on posterboards which relate their interests and hobbies to a novel's elements. Paradigms therefore represent important interactions between each learner's and each author's experiential backgrounds.

For example, one student who surfs placed pipe-cleaner figures on cardboard surfboards, and this display demonstrated the rising and falling action of the novel through the surfer's approaches to the waves.

The reader's role as a raconteur, or storyteller, is another worthwhile strategy. When introducing a challenging book, the teacher might tell the story as a fairy tale, stopping at strategic points and encouraging students to complete the "fairy tale" and to retell it in that form. For additional motivation, the teacher can change voices, mimicking movie and television personalities, when reading characters' lines.

These three instructional strategies involve teacher modeling as they stress interactive and constructive comprehension processes. They also represent unique alternatives to traditional book reports, which tend to dissuade students from reading for pleasure. As teachers, supervisors, and administrators, we should view these and similar strategies not as a frill but as an important source of support for facilitating improvement in students' attitude toward reading literature in the content areas. This perspective reinforces our notion that readers' affect can have a major impact on their reading performance.

Interestingly, these strategies complement the flexibility of interpretation that literature provides. Effective teachers have long known that insisting on the "correct meaning" of a trade book is absurd since readers activate both their conceptual knowledge and personal background as they read and construct meaning. More

than sixty years ago, F.C. Bartlett's classic work entitled Remembering: A Study in Experimental and Social Psychology (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1932) indicated that prior knowledge involves not only cognitive factors but also affective considerations, such as personal awareness, experiences, and feelings. Fortunately, this thrust continues today because it strongly supports the rational position that pursuing meaning is more a process of transacting with the author and his or her text than it is of finding the "correct answer" embedded in the text. By providing our students with a variety of strategies, such as those suggested by Guzzetti, we are demonstrating respect for varied interpretations of text and for individual ways of expressing meaning. We also are establishing a classroom environment that stimulates favorable feelings about reading literature.

## Thematic units

As our students' attitude about literature continues to improve, we can support this momentum through thematic units. This approach to instruction respects both content and process; thus, subject-matter teachers are more likely to consider thematic units seriously. This approach also helps our students to learn more effectively because they are given opportunities to visualize connections beyond the textbook. In addition, reading trade books, magazines, and other forms of literature increases the enjoyment of learning about themes since the literature is more interesting than textbooks and allows for flexibility of interpretation. Our students, therefore, feel empowered to learn through a variety of

sources that are sensitive to their personal awareness, experiences, and feelings.

In developing thematic units, a primary concern is locating appropriate materials. The school library/media specialist and the reading/resource room teacher are vital resources who can help classroom teachers select materials that are interesting, are varied in format and readability, are supportive of content-area curricula, and are well-matched with instructional goals.

If the theme concerns World War II, our students would probably enjoy reading Bette Greene's Summer of My German Soldier. This poignant historical novel blends important literary elements of setting and characterization with factual content germane to Wold War II. Thus, readers are able to both personalize history through literature and simultaneously learn about interesting facts, sometimes not included in textbooks. For example, one of our recent reviews of textbooks covering World War II revealed little or no information concerning German prisoners being held in the United States. Bette Greene's book, however, smoothly blends this valuable information with emotionally moving narration.

Another literary work about World War II is Corrie ten Boom's The Hiding Place. This sensitively written book tells of the author and her family's efforts to use their home for hiding Jews during the Nazi invasion of Holland. For such humanistic efforts, the author's family died in a concentration camp. Although The Hiding Place differs in perspective to Summer of My German Soldier, both sources can stimulate readers to have a profound transaction

with World War II. This outcome is attainable because literature provides students with opportunities to relate to characters who experienced the historical event.

Complementing these sources is Anne Frank's The Diary of a Young Girl. As readers enjoy the diary format, they gain a deeper understanding of and appreciation for a young person who actually lived and died during the Holocaust. Such a dramatic encounter can help students to become more sensitive to the plight of Holocaust victims and their loved ones and to become more involved in preventing such a horrifying historical period from being repeated. Educators who cause this type of response should be commended not only for exciting students about history but also for motivating them to make the world a better place in which to live.

In addition to these literary works, other worthwhile sources are useful for a thematic unit. For example, newspapers and such magazines as American History Illustrated, Current Events, Life, and Smithsonian Magazine provide retrospective articles about World War II and other historical events. These materials also enhance our students' enjoyment of reading while they promote the lifetime reading habit.

## Team teaching

When appropriate literature has been selected, teachers, supervisors, and administrators should decide on the best approaches for using the literature across the curriculum. With the help of the reading/resource room teacher, we may cooperatively agree on a variety of approaches such as team teaching, which is

a feasible strategy for carrying out the literature-based innovation. In addition to providing opportunities for mutual planning among colleagues, team teaching supports the use of large-group instruction for introducing a literary work. Thus, if World War II is the focus of study, the team decides which literary work would give balance to the instructional unit and then introduces the source during large-group instruction. This introduction demonstrates to our students that textbook content covered in social studies will be complemented by a personalized view of the War. For example, learners might be exposed to a brief presentation about a family who hid Jews from the Nazis and who experienced profound meaning and satisfaction from this act of humanity. While not revealing too many details of Corrie ten Boom's The Hiding Place, the presentation whets our students' curiosity about the book.

Afterward, learners return to their classes and become involved in small-group discussions. During these discussions, the teachers highlight the importance of vicariously experiencing the War through characters who lived and died during this horrifying period of history. Our students, in turn, are likely to mention their own vicarious experiences with a variety of wars. For instance, they may discuss family members who served during the Vietnam War or the Persian Gulf War, or they may talk about literature they already read concerning the dreadful aspects of war. The point to be made here is that small-group encounters stimulate our students' feelings and activate their prior knowledge

of the materials they are about to read.

When these goals are accomplished, learners engage in independent study of The Hiding Place. For individuals who are uninterested in this book or unable to read it, the classroom teacher guides them to select a comparable source that is better matched with their needs. Regardless of the book chosen, our students read for the purpose of appreciating history from a personalized perspective as they experience a synthesis of smooth narration and factual content. Since reading is both a solitary and a social act, our students have opportunities to read silently or to share their understanding of the book.

Throughout this team-teaching process, teachers serve in a diversity of roles, including making presentations, guiding small groups of learners, and facilitating individual activities. These roles help our students to understand and appreciate literature across the curriculum while they reinforce our commitment to pursuing practices that support the lifetime reading habit. To determine success with such practices, we can assess them in a variety of ways, including (a) observing our students' engagement during the reading and discussing of their books, (b) holding individual and small-group conferences to discuss our students' understanding of and appreciation for their literary works and the personalized perspectives they represent, (c) conducting attitude surveys to determine if our students have improved their feelings toward reading and subject matter, and (d) judging our students' individually selected outcomes, such as a character chart,

paradigm, or role as raconteur.

Although this approach to team teaching is worthwhile in its present form, it also can serve as a foundation for more extensive interdisciplinary experiences. For example, several disciplines--English, social studies, music, and science--could be blended to focus on the question "Is war ever justified?" (See the November 1992 ASCD Curriculum Update.) In this model, our students could immerse themselves in the perspectives of literary authors, historians, composers, scientists, and others concerned with this thought-provoking question. As individuals learn traditional content in each discipline, they integrate the disciplines to develop a better grasp of how these connecting experiences can be applied to the understanding and solving of real problems. Meanwhile, they gain a deeper appreciation for the value of interdisciplinary immersion. Guiding our students to enjoy literature through an extensive interdisciplinary approach lessens their vacuous learning as it enhances their lifelong literacy.

## Summary

These suggestions represent only a few of the ways in which teachers, supervisors, and administrators can cooperatively support literature-based practices across the curriculum. Creating a positive professional attitude toward this innovation, helping our students develop a similar attitude, designing thematic units, and incorporating team teaching provide a realistic context for complementing and transcending traditional textbooks. These approaches also increase the chances of promoting our students'

long-term reading habit. Carrying out successful literature-based practices, however, depends on genuine sharing among colleagues. Educational leaders, therefore, should not dictate approaches to implementation. Instead, they should provide encouragement during every phase of carrying out the innovation. Unless cooperation becomes the norm, such worthwhile ideas as using literature across the curriculum will not have the beneficial impact that they deserve. More specifically, we may never experience the joy of having former students visit us to express their lifetime love of reading.

FIGURE 1

A comparison of some factors related to textbooks and literature-based materials

| Factors | Textbooks | Literature-Based Materials |
|---|---|---|
| Presentation of text | Ideas are organized in a listlike and listless fashion | Ideas are blended with poignant narration |
| | A large number of concepts are introduced | Less concepts and themes are highlighted in the context of greater depth |
| Short-term, long-term perspective | Immediate information is provided for classroom discussion and related tests | More opportunities are given for responding both intellectually and emotionally to the text and for developing the lifetime reading habit |
| Variability | One source usually dominates instruction | A variety of "real" resources (trade books, pamphlets, magazines, etc.) supports instruction |
| Comprehensibility | Content is uninteresting and detached from readers' prior knowledge | Content is more easily personalized and understood by readers |
| Applicability across the curriculum | Information is vacuously linked to separate subject areas | A diversity of themes can easily be adapted to several content areas |
| Externally, internally driven curriculum | A single publisher controls the bulk of the curriculum | Educators and students determine curricular focus |
| Externally, internally driven assessment | Chapter-related questions dominate quizzes and tests | Individually selected outcomes (projects, portfolios, interactions, etc.) are used to determine progress |
| Emulation of home environment | Parents and children rarely read textbooks for pleasure | Family members are more likely to read, read aloud, and discuss "real" resources |